

Attorney General's Office Warns Delawareans About Rental Scams

The Consumer Protection Unit of the Delaware Department of Justice warns Delawareans that to be wary of scams when looking for a vacation rental this summer. The scammers operating rental schemes find legitimate rental postings and capture the information and photos of the property, and then list it on Craigslist or other online advertising platforms. Unsuspecting consumers looking for a good deal on a vacation rental find the bogus posting, send a deposit, and receive confirmation of their rental, only to arrive and find other people in the home, leaving the consumers unable to gain access to the property they believed they had rented, and nowhere to go.

Rental home scams also occur with regard to longer term residential rentals. Prospective tenants in these scenarios may be shown an available property where the scammers have changed the locks to unlawfully gain access. The scammers will collect a security deposit and first month's rent, and may even provide keys and allow the consumer to move into the property. Typically, only when the true owner or a neighbor notices, will the tenant be aware they have been conned.

All consumers should be diligent before entering into any type of lease for a rental property or providing any deposit or rental payment by taking these steps first:

- Consider working with a licensed realtor or property management company when possible;
- If using an online search engine or website, research whether the property appears on other websites or listing platforms and make contact with the listing

agents to determine which is the legitimate advertisement;

- Research who the true owner of the property is by doing a parcel search online: In Delaware, one can search New Castle County properties at <http://www3.nccde.org/parcel/search/>; Kent County properties at <http://kent400.co.kent.de.us/PropInfo/PIName.HTM>, and Sussex County properties at, <https://sussexcountyde.gov/zoning-and-sales-information>;
- Carefully review the posting, advertisement or lease for misspellings and grammatical errors;
- If you are looking at a rental through an online listing site, you should familiarize yourself with the site's policies for detecting and dealing with potentially fraudulent listings;
- Never pay any security deposit or rental payment in cash—always use a check, money order or credit card—and demand a receipt;

For long-term leases:

- Demand a written lease in advance, including identification and contact information for the landlord and the bank where your security deposit (if applicable) will be held;
- When possible, request a walk-through before agreeing to rent or paying any deposit;
- Talk to neighbors to learn more about the property and the owners—be cautious of properties with a recently deceased owner or foreclosure;
- If you meet the person claiming to be the landlord, request to see their credentials, such as a business card or realtor's license, and identification; you should also make note of the make and model of their car and the license plate number; and
- If you remit payment and discover you have been scammed,

contact your financial institution as soon as possible to see if the funds can be recalled or recovered.

Consumers who believe they may have been scammed should contact their local police department and file a report. They can also call the Attorney General's toll-free Consumer Hotline at (800) 220-5424, or email DOJ's Consumer Protection Unit at consumer.protection@delaware.gov. If the listing was posted on an online platform, such as Craigslist, the consumer should also file complaints with the online platform and with federal law enforcement at www.ic3.gov.